DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 224 977 CE 034 805

AUTHOR Parson, Steve R.; Dudley, Charles J.
TITLE An Examination of the Nature of Process in Community Education.
PUB DATE 9 Dec 82
NOTE 13p.; Presented at the Annual Convention of the National Community Education Association (Atlanta, GA, December 9, 1982).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; Agency Cooperation; Bureaucracy; *Citizen Participation; Community Cooperation; *Community Coordination; *Community Education; Democracy; *Educational Cooperation; Educational Research; *Public Agencies; School Community Relationship; *School Districts; Social Agencies

ABSTRACT

Through the late 1970s the idea was expressed that community education provides a structure for citizen involvement in local decision-making processes and that democratic processes would be reintroduced at the community level through a new commitment to it. Minzey and LeTarte proposed the concept of process--to develop a community process of citizen involvement in a more democratic decision-making system. Community education has been located, for the most part, however, in a closed bureaucracy--the local school system. Perhaps Minzey and LeTarte went too far in their claims of process, and community education is capable of the following: making better use of the capital and knowledge resources of the local school system, aiding in the development of an educational system comprehensive in its response to community needs, fostering interaction between schools and community agencies toward resolution of community problems, and serving as an open area of the school bureaucracy. Three projects in rural communities in Mid-Atlantic states were studied to see if community educational projects moved toward process as they aged. Findings supported the conclusion that the community educational programs were basically bureaucratically structured as part of the local school system. However, the findings also showed that community educational programs served to open the school's bureaucracy by suing the local schools for classes for all citizens and that the projects cooperated with other agencies to provide resources and programs. (YLB)

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ED224977

AN EXAMINATION OF THE NATURE OF PROCESS IN COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Steve R. Parson and Charles J. Dudley

Presented at the Annual Convention of the
National Community Education Association - Research Forum
Atlanta, GA.
December 9, 1982

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

CE034905

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An Examination of the Nature of Process in Community Education

Community education has a wonderful name. It employs two concepts dear to American Society: community, a sense of togetherness, of neighbor to neighbor interaction; and education, the door to equal opportunity, the hope of societal progress. Small wonder that such a name inspires great plans. Given the ideological assumptions implied by community and education it is not surprising that someone would see their possible linkage to democratic process, and this is precisely what Minzey and LaTarte among others began to establish as the major goals of community education. The idea expressed through the late seventies was that community education provided a structure for citizen involvement in local decision making process and democratic processes would be reintroduced at the community level.

That community education could achieve the goal of helping develop community process was supported by three major factors:

(1) There were resources. The development of community education began as a way to use the public school as a more comprehensive community resource. First and foremost, then, there was a place for activity. Secondly, there was talent and need. American society was developing a new technology. The local citizenry gained new ideas and skills and along with them the desire to know more. Old jobs with old skills were being replaced by new jobs needing new skills. Workers whose jobs became highly specialized wanted to know how to bake bread,

repair cars, read, paint (houses or portraits), or use a camera. Into this situation, the local school provided a place in which talents could be exchanged.

(2) There was increased emphasis on the local community making its own decisions. Beginning with the Nixon Administration, state and local communities were given grants (i.e. revenue sharing) to solve their own problems. In a sometimes exciting and sometimes perverse manner, there was a return to the ideals of a Jeffersonian democracy. Local decisions were the business of local communities. This could be exciting when it led to increased participation by all citizens, perverse when it yielded a loss in the gains made in social and ethnic integration, or a return to the maintenance of a status quo. Whatever it uses, an increased emphasis on local life as opposed to national life took shape.

(3) In the normal population of the educational system, the K-12 students were rapidly decreasing. Little need be said about the radical shifts in the population dynamics of the last three generations except to note them as fast. The "baby boom" generated a rapid increase in both capital outlay for public schools and the number of school personel. The following generation, held to replacement level birth rates, left an inflated school house with room to spare. More importantly, it forced educators to expand the scope of education.

In this volatile environment, community education came into its own. And, it tried to address all three needs: to manage resources, seek new clients for the educational system, and to

take advantage of the growing desire on the part of state and federal governments to return local decision making back to the community. Minzey captures this spirit exactly, and with LaTarte he proposes the concept of process. By process, he means to develop a community process of citizen involvement in a more democratic decision making system. The problem is that local school systems were not democratic systems, but instead are highly developed, closed bureaucracies. The local school organization has developed around the K-12 program. Such a program is suited to an assembly line structure, and as a result is suited to bureaucratic organization. As educators have become more professional and specialized, and as education has been broadened to include many different aspects of life, its organizational structure has become more closed than open. That is to say that by and by, control of the educational system has been taken away from the public and placed in the hands of professionals. To further concentrate this power of the bureaucracy, states instituted mandatory attendence laws, which in turn forced more bureaucracy. Some critics, such as Illich (1972), argue for a general "de-schooling of society," meaning the debureaucratization of the schools.

Community education has been conceived as a way to meet the educational needs of a changing population and as a method for the solution of general community problems by citizen involvement. For the most part, it has been located in a closed bureaucracy- the local school system. While some argue for democratic process, its location in a closed bureaucracy is

hardly conducive to democratic process. To suggest that community education could, in fact, become a process of community democracy, is to assume that the school system is capable, as a bureaucracy, of becoming an open democratic system. This is not - from a sociological point of view - possible.

The generally negative connotation applied to bureaucracy is largely undeserved. In the school system, only a bureaucratic structure could efficiently and effectively deal with the number of students it confronts. To organize the local school system in any non-bureaucratic form is to deny an even larger number of students some aspects of the educational resources in the society. Conversely, to severely close the bureaucracy is to deny any community input to the system. A democratic process placed in the bureaucracy is not possible.

It is in this framework that we suggest the possibility that community education, in addition to providing a solution for the problems listed above, might have the impact of making the bureaucracy of the school a more open one. In short, we argue that Minzey and Letarte, among others, went too far in their claims of process, that they mixed structural forms-bureaucracy and democracy-that are not easily contained within one system. Community education programs can, in our view, do the following:

(1) Make better use of the capital and knowledge resources of the local school system.

(2) Aid the community and the school system in the development of an educational system that is comprehensive in its response to community needs.

(3) Foster the interaction between schools and other community agencies toward resolution of community problems.

(4) It can serve as an open area of the school bureaucracy to allow the community and the schools to engage in a give and take concerning the general welfare of the community and what the schools can do to foster the community's interest.

These arguments are based on a study of three community education projects. In what follows, we will describe the study and discuss the results in greater detail.

The Study

Given that the original intent of our research was to see if community education projects moved toward process as they aged, we chose three successful projects for study. The projects ranged from less than three years old to one six years old to one in its twelfth year. The working hypothesis was the projects would develop, in Minzey and Letarte's terms, from program to process. The three projects were located in rural communities in states in the Mid-Atlantic region. All are viable projects with many programs developed and operating in the community.

The methods used in the study are variations of the community reconnaissence method developed by Sanders (1950), Nix (1965), Nix and Dudley (1966, 1967) and Nix, et. al. (1969). Basically the reconnaissence method involves the identification of people who are knowledgeable about the community education program and interviewing them about the operation of the system. We asked the

directors of the projects to identify people involved in all areas of the community education activities in their local area. Students, instructors advisory council members,and the community education professiona. staff were interviewd. In addition, discussions were held with the school principals, the central office staff of the local school system, and with the directors of other, non-school agencies in the community. The number of interviews varied by the size of the project and the availability of the respondents. We collected 23 interviews on the smallest project and 63 on the largest. 31 interviews were collected in the third project. All interviews were collected by the authors of this paper.

The Findings.

The results of the larger study are found in the project report (Dudley and Parsons, 1982). Our concern here is with a more specific set of questions:

(1) Were the relations among participants reciprocal? In the interview we asked people to name the people they worked with in community education the most. Reciprocal naming would imply a more democratic structure while non reciprocal naming would signify a bureaucatic hierarchical structure. In all three systems combined, there were only 18 reciprocal namings out of 374 possibilities. Clearly this indicates a bureaucratic structure. Even more significantly, the reciprocal naming occured mostly among the professional staff of the projects and between the professional staff and the school superintendent office. Even in the oldest project there were only 8 reciprocal

namings out of 105 possibilities, less that 10% of the interviewees. Clearly the bureaucratic needs of the program transcend the needs of open, democratic process.

(2) How do superintendents relate to community education projects? In all cases, the project director is a member of the central office staff. The superintendents generally viewed the community education project as another part of the over-all school structure. They define things in largely bureaucratic terms. For instance, one superintendent talked of maintaining the boundaries between community education, adult education and vocational education. None of the superintendents referred, either directly or indirectly, to a concept of "process" or of "open participation in community problem solving." Instead, they talk of reduced vandalism in school buildings, of the positive attitudes people have toward the programs, and of the popularity of certain classes. Superintendents did not have, or at least, did not discuss the Minzey and LaTarte version of process.

(3) What is the relationship between the community education program and agencies outside the school system? Basically, the structure of the community education program was perceived to be bureaucratic. The question becomes, does the community education program open the bureaucracy of the school system to the larger community. Our data lead us to give a qualified yes to that question. In the older systems, community colleges, social services for the aged and local extension agents were all

associated with the community education program. There was considerable cooperation between the project and other agencies in the oldest projects. The community college, for instance, shared considerable resources with the project including space, supplies, and equipment.

These findings support the conclusion that the community education programs in three rural communities are basically bureaucratically structured as part of the local school system for the following reasons: (1)People in the project did not reciprocally name each other as an open democratic process would require. (2)The advisory councils were not as central to the project as the "process" would require. (3)The superintendents view the projects as an integral part of the bureaucratic structure of the local schools. All these factors represent the closed nature of the projects. Conversely, the fact that the community education programs served to open the school's bureaucracy is shown by 1)the local schools were used for community education classes for all citizens, and 2)the projects cooperated with other agencies to provide resources and programs. Thus while the community education projects were found to be bureaucratic, they served to open the school bureaucracy to the larger commumity environment. An open bureaucracy is, in sociological terms, one that develops an orientation towards its external environment. Rather than creating "process", the community education program serves to open the school to the community.

Conclusions

Our research has led us to conclude that the goal of a democratic process in community education is one that may be unattainable in most traditional, school based projects. The fact that most school systems are bureaucracies; and for the most part, closed bureaucracies, makes the prospect of fostering a democratic process dim.

Public schools, while they typically espouse the rhetoric of citizen participation, the record tends to reveal more talk than action. In fact upon examination we find most public schools to be bureacracies closed to the communities in which they exist. As early as the 1940's critics of public schools warned of this isolationism. William Carr's now famous quotation provides an excellent statement of this condition.

> "Many schools are like little islands set apart from the mainland of life by a deep moat of convention and tradition. Across this moat there is a drawbridge which is lowered at certain periods during the day on order that certain part-time inhabitants (kids) may cross over to the island in the morning and back to the mainland at night. ...After the last inhabitant of the island has left in the early afternoon, the drawbridge is raised," (Carr, 1942).

Unfortunately, in many communities the William Carr's "islands" still exist in the 1980's. The exciting thing about what we found in our study was that community education is helping public schools to open themselves to the community. More than just physically opening the buildings, we observed that a broad spectrum of citizens were being served by community education programs, and community agencies and institutions were observed working toward a collaborative relationship with community schools.

All of this seems to indicate that school based community educators can still use Minzey/LeTarte model of "program to process" as long as they realistically define process as an open bureaucratic process. There are alternatives open to the community educator. These include (1) implementing a democratic process model of community education based in the community rather than the public schools, or (2) changing the structure of the public schools to reflect an institution based on a model of participatory democracy.

There are problems inherent in each of these options. In the first, most grass-root communities don't possess the resources needed to initiate and sustain a community education program. And in the second alternative change in the public schools often comes at a painfully slow pace.

All of this brings us to our main conclusion. That is that community education is making a very important contribution in helping schools to open themselves to becoming "community schools" in the truest sense. This does not mean that the goal of citizens involvement in community development and problem-solving should be abandoned. Rather, it means that it may be unrealistic to hold that as a major goal of the "ideal" community education program.

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